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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [BL](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: FRACTURED BOLIVIAN OPPOSITION UNITING AGAINST EVO?

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Discussions with Bolivian opposition contacts suggest several parties are making serious efforts to form a united front against President Evo Morales before the December 2009 elections. The head of the Unidad Nacional (UN) party, Samuel Doria Medina, has proposed to create a "United Front of the Left," while MAS dissidents have separately indicated their desire to construct a centrist alliance that would include center-right parties as well. Although the specific proposals vary, all involved seem to have come to the same conclusion: a unified opposition is key to preventing Evo Morales' re-election and a potential MAS super-majority in the Congress -- and with it the ability of the MAS to modify the Constitution at will. End summary.

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UN Proposes United Center-Left Front
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¶2. (C) The head of the Unidad Nacional (UN) party, Samuel Doria Medina, has proposed to create a "United Front of the Left" to challenge President Evo Morales in the expected December 2009 elections. In an interview in leading daily La Razon on November 4, Doria Medina said he recognized that the opposition's options were limited, especially with power now dispersed among multiple opposition parties. To combat this problem, he suggested a preliminary primary election cycle that would produce one candidate to lead the opposition. Doria Medina suggested all potential candidates for the presidency campaign during the first part of 2009, with a primary to be held May 31. Under this plan, the candidate that emerged from this process would be the main opposition candidate, and would then have the rest of the year to campaign against Morales, under the banner of the United Front of the Left. Doria Medina said the National Electoral Court could facilitate the primary voting.

¶3. (C) PolOff had previously met with UN party representative Peter Maldonado on October 31 and received similar indications of a "grand alliance against Evo." At the time, Maldonado conceded the plan was "just talk for now," especially given the inherent difficulties in "managing opposition egos," but said initial indications from their outreach were positive. Maldonado went on to characterize the potential alliance as broad, potentially including the

center-right parties of Podemos and MNR. When asked about including MAS dissidents, Maldonado equivocated, calling such talk "premature" but saying it could be considered "on a case-by-case basis." He did not name any names, but said some of the dissidents were not "reliable." Maldonado said Doria Medina told him former President Carlos Mesa had already been consulted about the possibility of an alliance. Mesa agreed that whoever was polling highest in mid-2009 should be the Presidential candidate, with the second place finisher receiving the Vice-Presidential nod. (Note: The fact that this arrangement contradicts the November 4 press report of a formal primary process, and that Maldonado refers to the inclusion of center-right parties in the alliance suggests their plans are still quite fluid. End note.) Maldonado reported that Doria Medina said he and Mesa were still working to convince others including Podemos leader and former President Tuto Quiroga to endorse the plan.

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Not Bedfellows Just Yet
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¶4. (C) While the meeting with Maldonado suggested Mesa's interest in a unified opposition alliance, Mesa's statements in the La Razon interview indicate he is not yet ready to make this interest public. The article stated Mesa was not yet familiar with the plan. Instead, he said the proposal of a left front was "interesting" but that he "would need to talk with Samuel." Mesa said his primary focus was now on the new Constitution, on which he would need to focus before beginning to think about a left front movement. Similarly, the leader of the Social Alliance party (AS), Rene Joaquin, said the election should not be about one person or one party, and that the focus needs to be on pluralism: "Democracy is not strengthened with bipartisanship, it is strengthened with pluralist participation."

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MAS Dissidents Also Interested in Centrist Alliance
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¶5. (C) PolOff met with MAS Deputy (and dissident leader) Guillermo Becker on October 30, where Becker discussed his own plan to form a large centrist alliance against Morales. Becker said he directly represented a group of five dissident Masistas and that up to 15 or 20 percent of the MAS bancada were becoming disaffected with the President. (Note: In a separate meeting with MAS Deputy Ana Lucia Reis, she put the number as high as one-third. End note.) Becker fleetingly mentioned the names of the other four dissidents, likely referring to the following: Senator Guido Guardia, Senator Gerald Ortiz, Deputy Ciro Garcia, and Deputy Ricardo Aillon Alvarez. Becker said they would be interested in forming as broad a group as possible, with a centrist platform, and specifically mentioned recruiting former Presidents Mesa and Tuto Quiroga (Podemos), as well as ex-Cochabamba Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa (New Republican Force). Becker also noted that as dissidents in a party that has not welcomed internal criticism, they were now caught in between the MAS and the opposition. He said he and the other dissidents would not seek to join another party, because they did not share their ideology, but that an opposition alliance was a more inviting possibility.

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Comment
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¶6. (C) The opposition is recognizing early that the only way to defeat Morales in the planned December 2009 elections is to unify. While it is driven by disaffection with Morales' policies and governing style, the opposition's need to come together also stems from more pragmatic concerns, such as their need for money. The opposition has been economically exhausted by referendum after referendum, and previously disaffected parties are realizing they have no choice but to reach out to each other. Similarly, the impulse toward unity

is helped along by the fear that if MAS wins two-thirds of Congress it will be able to modify the Constitution at will. There is general agreement that Podemos is not in a position to lead or unite the opposition, and a "United Front for the Left" could fill that void. Historically, Bolivian politicians have been able to form grand alliances among unlikely bedfellows, most notably perhaps in the 1950s and 1960s under the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement. Whether the opposition will be able to turn the same trick remains to be seen, but at the least it appears different opposition parties have recognized that a factionalized opposition does not have a chance against Evo and the MAS.

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